

The hubris of Peter and justice in Gods' world

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Mark 8.31-38

Friends, I am not a fist-thumping fire and brimstone preacher.

Mostly, what I feel compelled to preach on is God's love for you, and to encourage you in your ministry and mission as empowered agents of God's love.

If that is all you remember from this sermon- I am ok with that.

But in truth, today, in this season of creation, I will take a departure from the norm of pure encouragement.

This is as close to a 'fire and brimstone' sermon as I get, and it is because, as a society, we are asleep at the wheel on so many issues of common justice- including the environment- the inhumane treatment of the homeless, the lack of progress on reconciliation, and the scourge of domestic violence.

The time for gently, gently-subdued-tip-toe church, has passed.

Today we join Jesus in frustration with off-piste distractions.

In the Gospels, the bumbling disciples are often doing and saying the wrong thing (like the story's buffoons) so that Jesus can set them straight and we can glean the teaching.

Today, Peter is the buffoon. He takes Jesus aside and rebukes him saying "Jesus you don't need to suffer, you don't need to

die in order to be raised etc”.

Then Jesus is very hard on Peter and says: “Get behind me Satan”, which seems somewhat of an overreaction given his friend just wanted him spared suffering and death.

Some scholars believe that Peter just does NOT GET who Jesus is.

According to this view, Peter is innocent and naïve.

Peter wants Jesus to be that strong-man messiah they’d been waiting for.... without all the unglamorous dying and suffering. We can’t begrudge that impulse.

But look at Jesus’ sharp rebuke “get behind me Satan!”. That admonition does not support the line ‘Peter was a bumbling fool’.

There is another school of thought that says Peter knew who Jesus was.

That Jesus was the Messiah.

If that were true, and Peter took Jesus- the living Christ aside and told him off, it would be because Peter knew best.

Peter had a plan for how this whole ministry will go... and he wants Jesus to follow his lead.

Now that is some hubris. “I know you are God incarnate, but I know better than you about these events. Now, I’ll tell you how this will go”.

That would be some arrogance, wouldn’t it?

The fact that we are all here in church today shows that we mostly feel that there is probably a God who is interested in us and our lives.

The fact that you are here during the ‘season of creation’ at

St John's Halifax Street tells me that you are somebody who knows God is deeply interested in the created world too.

The world needs more Christians like you—more people who are listening keenly to God and want to find spiritual and practical solutions to corruption and exploitation.

The truth is God's interest is deeper and more encompassing in the material world than we can imagine.

The secular world paints a caricature of Christians in which we can only conceive of the sacred (read very few things) and the profane (read almost everything in our lives).

But this is absurd. Many Christians know God cares about the use and abuse of all the world's resources no matter where they are, no matter what the rationale for destruction. God cares about every person, animal, and environment whose right to exist is imperilled by greed.

When I was studying for my first undergraduate degree, as I studied with a lot of journalists. I learnt this terrible truth about the personal proximity to tragedy being required for our concern to be piqued.

The public's interest in a tragedy is impacted by some key factors, including the proximity of the tragedy, the colour of the skin of the people experiencing the tragedy, the nationality of the victims of the tragedy, the part of the world in which a tragedy is happening, and the number of people impacted by the tragedy.

All these factors influence how much we believe a tragedy to be a BIG deal- and by extension how much we imagine GOD thinks any tragedy is a BIG deal.

If you can visualise, there are concentric circles of interest to do with geography/ race/ and a range of other factors.

So, if something awful happens on Halifax St, it only needs to

be a singular event to make the news and impact us. No doubt we think, "Wow, that's the right near St John's—how awful."

If that involves somebody who looks like a member of our family, we will remember that event the following year.

To have the same impact on us, a tragedy interstate will need to be an even greater level tragedy or involve lots more people.

These circles of interest radiate out. The further away from us, or less related, then the less we care.

It means that when Muslim or Jewish children are suffering and dying in a place we know little about, and when they may not look exactly like the children we raised, we can feel quite distant from the tragedy.

Even when the number of innocent children dying in the Holy Land reaches around 15,000 in less than a year and the human suffering is incalculable.

Here is the other side to that- the Peter-like hubris. We can begin to think God is not all that bothered either. God cares more for Adelaide and our needs than anywhere else.

Of course, if disaster were to strike in Adelaide, God would care a lot. The truth we Christians know is that despite our instincts to prioritise human life, God cares a lot everywhere.

God cares about polluted cities in China that we talk about in Australia, but also cares about what people in the luxurious West do with our consumption and destruction patterns.

In 2024 the Church has forgotten the legacy of justice promotion entrusted to it. The time for gently, gently-subdued-tip-toe church, has passed.

Remember the BCP words before we pray intercessions "Let us

pray for the whole state of Christ's Church militant here in earth"?

So we pray that the creator God leads us clearly into as much truth as we can handle this 'season of creation', and may God preserve us from the hubris of telling God to follow our plan. Let us each continue to work and pray for the state of Christ's Church militant here in earth'.

The Lord be with you.